

Keeping Peace During Elections In Sierra Leone



Photo: Laura Lartigue

Court Administrator and USAID Nation Building participant Aly Jawara in Kabala, Sierra Leone.

"We were able to resolve the matter because of the training we attended. Otherwise, I might have joined the crowd myself. The training helped me keep my emotions under control and gave me a better perspective on the situation."

- Court Administrator Aly Jawara

USAID sponsored a Nation Building program in Sierra Leone's Kono, Kailahun and Koinadugu Districts – the districts longest held under rebel control, and considered to be the most devastated by the civil war. The program accelerates post-war reintegration by curtailing corruption, building the spirit of public service, and strengthening local communities' capacity to participate in democratic processes.

In January 2003, paramount chief elections in Sierra Leone were generally orderly, and violence-free. However, the Sengbe Chiefdom election heated up after the first round of elections. Disgruntled at alleged vote fixing and the resulting prospect of a run-off election, youth leader Alie Mara and his supporters marched and threw stones at the home of Alie's main opponent and well-known parliamentary leader.

USAID Nation Building participants quickly stepped in to conduct joint interventions and successfully diffused the tensions. A second round of voting was held on January 24, 2003 without incident, in which Alie Mara won by a wide margin.